

A Master Naturalist Comes Full Circle

Kenneth Nalley, Park Naturalist / Volunteer Coordinator

Training for the 2019 Cross Timbers Master Naturalist class officially began on Tuesday, August 20 at 6:00 pm. For me, this marked the 5th anniversary of when I first stepped into the Murray James Auditorium at the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge as a green new student, unsure of what this adventure had in store for me.

I had signed up for the class with a friend, thinking it would be a great way to learn more about our local natural areas that I enjoyed exploring so much. I have always loved nature and being outdoors, and it had long been my hope to pursue a career in this field. Unfortunately, as so often happens, I had been derailed by life and settled for a job in the banking world. When Master Naturalists came into my life, I was at a crossroads. Not fully satisfied by my career choices, I decided I needed to make a change and pursue the career I had always truly wanted. During the program, I fell in love with the beauty of Texas in a way I had never before. Each week, I was enthralled by the subject matter and inspired by the passion of the presenters. My fellow students were equally inspirational to me. We were from different walks of life, taking the class for various reasons, but our shared interest in nature bonded us together.

After Master Naturalist training ended, I followed my dreams and pursued a career in this field. I enrolled at Tarleton State University, pursuing a degree in Wildlife, Sustainability, and Ecosystem Sciences. I stayed active in Master Naturalists throughout my time at Tarleton, even helping launch a university-affiliated chapter. Five years later, I am back at the place that started it all, living my dream as a naturalist/volunteer coordinator at the Nature Center. I owe so much to what I have accomplished in my career to the Master Naturalist program. And now it's my turn to be that spark of inspiration for the new class of students.

Sitting there the first night of the program, I couldn't help but reminisce about the journey I had been on since I first sat in that auditorium five years prior. This year will be my first time teaching a portion of the program, and while that induces much anxiety in me, I see it as an opportunity to give back to an organization that has given so much to me. I not only hope I can teach the students valuable information about our natural world, but I hope I can be a source of inspiration for them, a small catalyst to help them pursue their goals and be the change they wish to see in the world. That's what Master Naturalists has done for me, and if I can share just a little bit of that magic with the new class, then I will have done my job.



Earning this certificate helped spur Kenneth Nalley onto a new career path. That makes it a very special document. Kenneth Nalley Photo.